

January 18, 2007

Madam Chairman and Members of the Human Services Sub-Committee:

My name is Vickie Poynter and I live in Kalispell. I am the CEO of Flathead Industries, a private non-profit agency which provides services to approximately 125 of Montana citizens with disabilities working and residing in Flathead County. Additionally, I serve as the CEO of two other non-profit agencies, Little Bitterroot Services in Plains and Achievements, Inc., in Libby. Little Bitterroot provides services to 28 of Montana citizens with disabilities, while Achievements serves 38 of these citizens.

I would like to thank Committee Members for the funding increases this Committee worked hard to provide in past legislative years to assist community based providers maintain qualitative services to Montana Citizens with Disabilities. Speaking on behalf of my three agencies, each individual corporation has had to make hard choices on where to put dollars received --which ancillary personnel to eliminate, which facilities are repaired, which facilities receive a computer, etc. Generally speaking, unless safety is at issue, dollars are not put towards equipment or repairs. Our dollars, whether received from funding increases or from eliminated positions is put towards recruiting and retaining quality direct care professionals.

The average wage for direct care employees within my three agencies is approximately \$8.90 per hour, with the starting wage ranging between \$7.85 and \$8.40. Employees in these positions work with the citizens they serve because they have the heart to do so. During the course of their shifts they assist individuals with all aspects of daily living. This includes bathing, toileting, dressing, eating, teeth cleaning, leisure activities, behavior management, transportation, employment skills, bill paying, cooking, cleaning -- all the daily activities many of us take for granted. One \$8.90 an hour employee, during the course of one shift, is a Personal Care Attendant, a CNA, a taxi driver, a dental assistant, a cook, a housekeeper, a bookkeeper, a teacher, a confidant, a friend and many times, a family member. For \$8.90 an hour, that is quite a job description. These employees must receive a wage/benefit increase, in order to be willing to continue employment with us. We must be able to pay a wage which will attract quality employees, AND to retain them.

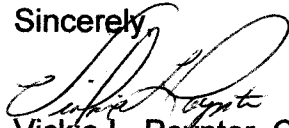
Because we have directed any and all increased funding to direct care wages, we have eroded our ability to maintain our infrastructures. Funding must be allocated to provide assistance with building maintenance for residential and work facilities, vehicles, or equipment. Our costs for various insurances, gas, oil, electric have far surpassed funding.

Although I appreciate the Governor's budget request for the \$18 million funding increase over the next biennium, I respectfully urge the committee to fund community based programs at the \$30 million biennium increase level. This figure is real and was determined from a comprehensive analysis of our real costs of doing business. If we

can shore up what we currently do, community based providers will have the where with all to serve MDC individuals ready and able to move into the community.

Thank you for listening and thank you for the work ahead of you as members of this extremely important sub-committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Vickie L. Poynter".

Vickie L. Poynter, CEO

Flathead Industries, Kalispell
Little Bitterroot Services, Plains
Achievements, Inc., Libby